

Personality and athletic performance: A study of Indonesian U-17 football players

Personalidad y rendimiento atlético: un estudio de jugadores de fútbol indonesios sub-17

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Abstract. Football players should be trained from a young age. However, to continue to develop well, many factors play a role before they become mature. One important factor is personality. This study aims to determine what personality should be possessed by grassroots-level football players in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative method with grounded theory analysis. The primary data sources for this study are ten grassroots-level football coaches from Indonesia who have trained for five years and have a coaching license. In addition, the results of observations and documents are also additional data sources. At the data analysis stage, the researcher used open coding followed by axial and selective coding to obtain themes in this study. To help facilitate organizing and analyzing data, the researcher used Nvivo version 14. The results of this study indicate that there are five essential personalities for a grassroots-level football athlete to have, namely: Mental toughness, a trait characterized by positive, realistic, calm, and clear thinking even under pressure in a match; adaptive, namely the extent to which an athlete can adapt both in life and in a match; energetic, the extent to which an athlete has great energy to do training and matches; humble is a trait that is not arrogant and selfish in interacting with relations; and brave is a trait of daring to play every match. The results of this study can be a reference for football coaches at the grassroots level in Indonesia to improve the quality of young football players. It is hoped that further research can conduct exploratory research on personality in this study with other variables.

Keywords: Personality, grassroot, football, qualitative, grounded theory

Resumen. Los jugadores de fútbol deben ser entrenados desde una edad temprana. Sin embargo, para continuar desarrollándose bien, muchos factores juegan un papel antes de que maduren. Un factor importante es la personalidad. Este estudio tiene como objetivo determinar qué personalidad deben poseer los jugadores de fútbol de base en Indonesia. Este estudio utiliza un método cualitativo con análisis de teoría fundamentada. Las fuentes de datos principales para este estudio son diez entrenadores de fútbol de base de Indonesia que han entrenado durante cinco años y tienen una licencia de entrenador. Además, los resultados de las observaciones y los documentos también son fuentes de datos adicionales. En la etapa de análisis de datos, el investigador utilizó una codificación abierta seguida de una codificación axial y selectiva para obtener temas en este estudio. Para facilitar la organización y el análisis de los datos, el investigador utilizó Nvivo versión 14. Los resultados de este estudio indican que hay cinco personalidades esenciales que debe tener un atleta de fútbol de base, a saber: Fortaleza mental, un rasgo caracterizado por un pensamiento positivo, realista, tranquilo y claro incluso bajo presión en un partido; adaptativo, es decir, el grado en que un atleta puede adaptarse tanto en la vida como en un partido; energético, el grado en que un atleta tiene gran energía para hacer entrenamientos y partidos; humilde es un rasgo que no es arrogante ni egoísta en la interacción con las relaciones; y valiente es un rasgo de atreverse a jugar todos los partidos. Los resultados de este estudio pueden ser una referencia para los entrenadores de fútbol de base en Indonesia para mejorar la calidad de los jugadores de fútbol jóvenes. Se espera que futuras investigaciones puedan realizar una investigación exploratoria sobre la personalidad en este estudio con otras variables.

Palabras clave: Personalidad, fútbol, fútbol americano, teoría fundamentada, cualitativa

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Introduction

Football is one of the most popular sports in the world. Currently, football is not only popular with adults but also children who are known as grassroots. Early coaching of a football athlete is indeed important to do, especially in Indonesia to maintain athlete regeneration and extend the opportunity for a football athlete to develop a career. However, in its implementation there are many challenges in its implementation. Research conducted by Haugaasen and Jordet (2012) states that football is a very competitive sport so players must have good skills. One way to improve an athlete's abilities must start from the early development phase of a person. Development at the grassroots level is very important to pay attention to because they will become football athletes in the future. In Europe, football athletes at the grassroots level are not only trained to master playing techniques but they are also trained to maintain relationships with parents (Monk, 2022) and anti-racism (Garland

& Rowe, 1999).

As an athlete is still in the early stages of development, he or she must prepare at the grassroots level, including for personality development. According to Pettersen, Adolfsen, and Martinussen (2022), an athlete's personality plays an essential role in his or her performance, including in football. Personality is also one of the determinants of long-term success (Allen, Greenlees & Jones, 2013) and one of the keys to maintaining an athlete's relationship with others (Piepiora, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to explore what type of personality an athlete requires at the grassroots level. In other studies, conducted by Pettersen, Adolfsen, and Martinussen (2022) and Akbar et al. (2024a), an athlete's personality also plays an essential role in an athlete's performance, including in football, and is one of the determinants of long-term success (Allen, Greenlees & Jones, 2013) in maintaining an athlete's relationship with others (Piepiora & Witkowski, 2020). Thus, it is crucial to explore the personality traits that an athlete must possess at the

grassroots level to succeed.

Research on personality in the context of sports has been conducted in the fields of fitness and the gym (de Sousa, Coelho, & Mota, 2022; Zagalaz Sánchez et al., 2017; Sepdanius, 2023), running (Lopez & Sanchez, 2023), basketball (de Souza Vale et al., 2024), Wrestling (Bekbossynov et al., 2024), and not only in the field of e-sports (González Caino, Eirin, & Resett, 2024). In addition, personality has been widely studied as a predictor of many things in sports, such as motivation (de Sousa, Coelho, & Mota, 2022), performance (de Souza Vale et al., 2024), toxic behavior in athletes (González Caino, Eirin, & Resett, 2024), sportsmanship (Gama et al., 2020), enthusiasm for training (Bekbossynov et al., 2024), and adaptability (González Hernández & Jiménez, 2016). None of these studies explored personality in football at the grassroots level. Therefore, researchers are interested in conducting this study to enrich the literature on personality studies in sports.

A literature review study conducted by Shuai et al. (2023) found that studies that have been conducted on the role of personality in athlete competence have found unstable results. Research that further explores the role of personality in grassroots footballers has yet to be found. In addition, personality should also be studied contextually because it is influenced by the culture in which a person lives (Cheung, van de Vijver & Leong, 2011; Hofstede & McRae, 2004). In addition, personality is also influenced by where a person lives, in rural or urban areas (Chaeroni et al., 2024). Therefore, researchers use a qualitative approach to explore more deeply what kind of personality a football athlete must have at the grassroots level to succeed as a professional football athlete.

Akbar et al. (2024a, 2024b) also found that personality is an essential determinant of a soccer athlete's ability to perform. However, this study has yet to explore the meaning of the term personality. This study also recommends further research to explore the types of personality traits that soccer athletes possess. This study explored the types of personality that are important for a soccer athlete to have at the grassroots level. Villaverde-Carames et al. (2021) conducted exploratory research to determine a physical training teacher's personality type. Therefore, the researcher is confident in conducting this study. Researchers believe that personality plays a vital role in developing football skills at the grassroots level. According to Akbar et al. (2024b), coaches play an essential role in developing various aspects of athletes at the grassroots level, including personality.

Materials and Methods

This study aims to identify what kind of personality grassroots-level football athletes need in Indonesia. The researcher used a grounded theory approach, which is a qualitative approach to explore models that explain essential topics in a group (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006).

Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology that analyzes and models topics essential to a particular group of individuals. This approach was developed from the constructivist school through interpretive epistemology, which assumes that people create their reality by giving meaning to events, processes, ideologies, and conditions in the world (Elliott, Bevan, & Litchfield, 2019). In the context of psychology, grounded theory is often used for several reasons: 1) it is a rigorous approach to qualitative analysis, 2) it can also be used to research a person's experience; 3) grounded theory can be combined with other qualitative analysis approaches such as phenomenological psychology, thematic analysis, narrative, discursive, and action research, 4) grounded theory is beneficial for use with a mixed method approach (Charmaz & Henwood, 2017). Constructivist grounded theory emphasizes the role of the researcher as an author by reshaping the researcher-participant interaction during the research process (Mills et al., 2006). In this research, grounded theory is used to see how the discussion developed among football coaches in Indonesia related to the personality needed by grassroots-level football athletes in Indonesia. The coaches were asked to submit an explanation of what personality is needed by grassroots-level football athletes.

Participant

The study is centered on examining the experiences of grassroots football academy coaches in Indonesia. According to Sim et al. (2018), in qualitative research, the sample size is not fixed and is instead based on reaching informational saturation. In this research, the researcher employed purposive sampling to choose ten coaches from Indonesia. The selected coaches met specific criteria, including a minimum of 5 years of coaching experience and possessing a coaching license (Boddy, 2015).

Procedure

The researcher conducted the research based on predetermined procedures to ensure systematic research procedures. Next, the researcher determined the participants, ensuring their voluntary involvement. Participants were given verbal and written explanations regarding the study, including provisions on privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality related to the information to be provided. The total interview time was 1,643 minutes, or 27 hours 34 minutes, with a time allocation of 65 minutes for each participant. The interview guide was developed based on relevant literature and discussions that the researcher had conducted. To create the interview guide, the researcher relied on two conducted by MacNamara, Button, and Collins (2010) and Holt and Dunn (2004) as references.

During the interviews, the researcher began by asking the participants for their consent and willingness to provide informed consent. The researcher then explained the purpose of this study and how the identities and interview results were kept confidential. Subsequently, the researcher asked several opening questions related to the respondents,

such as how long they had trained football athletes at the grassroots level, what training the respondents had undergone, and what achievements they had received. Subsequently, the researcher entered the core question: According to the respondent's experience, what personality traits must a grassroots-level football athlete possess to succeed? In the interview process, the researcher probed specific answers to clarify or deepen the respondents' answers. In the final session, the researcher tried to retell several essential points from the interview to confirm whether the researcher's understanding was the same as that of the respondents. The researcher also recalled asking for documentary evidence and permission to conduct another interview at another time.

The researcher also used the triangulation process to check the data's credibility. Triangulation refers to combining methods or data sources in a qualitative study (Lune & Berg, 2011). It occurs when the researcher confirms evidence from multiple sources to clarify a theme or perspective (Creswell, 2014). Triangulation allows the researcher to analyze different types of data and validate findings by using multiple research methods to examine the same phenomenon, ensuring the reliability of the data obtained (Denzin, 2007). This study used interviews, observations, and coach diaries as its data sources. These three methods complement each other and strengthen the data obtained. We interviewed ten coaches from Indonesia to collect information. In addition, we collected data from observations made during training activities and notes kept by coaches and players during training.

The interview process was conducted iteratively, meaning that the researcher interviewed several respondents. Subsequently, the researcher conducted the coding process and compared the results with the original text, other coding results, and theory. If the results still had many weaknesses, the researcher re-interviewed them and carried out the same process. The researcher stops when the obtained data do not show significant differences or the data have reached saturation.

Data Analysis

The grassroots football academy model's conceptual framework was formed through descriptive analysis of the data in current grounded theory research using progressive coding. The conception process involves open, axial, and selective coding as distinct steps. The analysis was aided by Nvivo version 14 qualitative research software. The interview results were coded with the aid of this qualitative software analysis.

The evolved grounded theory approach employs 1) open encoding is coding carried out on the results of interviews as a whole, on each sentence that can become the main result; 2) axial encodings is the process of rearranging coding data to form categories and subcategories that describe the phenomenon being studied, and 3) selective coding is the process of determining core themes, integrating them according to theory or model, and describing

them in a matrix to facilitate the comparison of each theme (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Researchers initially identify, label, and categorize data in detail through open encoding, enabling the recognition of patterns and relationships between concepts. Through a continuous matching process, central themes are identified based on the selected encodings. Data were analyzed and subsequent collections were conducted based on the findings. Researchers analyze new data alongside existing data to uncover patterns, similarities, differences, or relationships among various codes or concepts.

Ethical Consideration

The Research Ethics Committee of Sultan Idris Education University (UPI) thoroughly reviewed and approved this study. The committee provided detailed feedback and recommendations, which the researcher used to refine the study and ensure ethical compliance. After several adjustments and improvements, the study received ethical clearance on May 15, 2023.

Results

This study aims to identify the personality traits a grassroots-level football athlete must have to develop well. The results show that there are five types of personality: mental toughness, adaptive, energetic, humble, and brave. Each theme will be discussed in the following section.

Mental toughness

Mental toughness is an athlete's ability to remain calm, focused, and intense despite challenges. An athlete with good mental toughness usually shows several characteristics, such as remaining calm when under pressure, being goal-oriented, recovering quickly from failure, being highly motivated, having emotional control, and having discipline and perseverance. Football players who want to become professional athletes must possess a strong mentality. Athletes who do not have a strong mentality will be affected by their discipline for training and not be too severe in facing challenges. It can also make athletes not want to train anymore because they consider the training complex. The following statement states that a mentally solid personality is essential for an athlete at the grassroots level.

"It takes a strong mentality and that is seen in the game, because the process that the player goes through if he does not have a strong mentality, is not really disciplined, is not really willing to face the challenge, to face the weight of the training and that will make him lose." (J12)

Adaptive

Adaptive personality is a person's ability to adjust to different situations, changes, and challenges in life effectively and constructively. People with adaptive personalities tend to be flexible, resilient, open to new things, able to manage stress well, independent, and optimistic. Athletes new to

training or matches sometimes must follow their expectations. In this situation, an athlete must be able to adapt so that training and matches can still be carried out with enthusiasm. In their careers, soccer players will face various challenges in this ever-evolving sport. The study found that adaptability is an important personality trait for soccer players, both on and off the field. Coaches who participated in the study highlighted examples such as adapting to different playing conditions and integrating into new communities. This adaptability is essential for thriving in various situations, including playing different sports. The following are the respondents' answers related to adaptive personality.

"We are training in a beautiful field, suddenly we enter a field of leafy grass, so we are afraid, we are afraid that we will get injured, so how do we want to guard that thing, which way do we want to guard it, because we guard it calmly, that's how patient we are. Positive thinking, that's from our perspective." (JM4)

Energetic

Another personality type that is important for grassroots athletes in Indonesia is the energetic. The energetic personality type is characterized by high energy, enthusiasm, and a positive, contagious attitude. Individuals with this personality type usually have a strong drive to achieve their goals, show enthusiasm in their daily activities, and inspire and motivate those around them. They often show perseverance, optimism, and high enthusiasm for their efforts. To support the competitiveness of soccer players under 17, they are expected to be fighters. Coaches tend to like energetic players. Every training and match always show enthusiasm and likes to fight on the field. The following is an answer from respondents who stated that energy is one of the essential personality forms that an athlete must have.

"I like players who have aggression, want to fight, meaning fighting spirit in the game, losing the ball, winning the ball, winning the ball, he is aggressive going forward, I said my type of game is like this and I need this kind of player character who has fighting spirit, playing fighting, then your job must be like that." (J19)

Humble

Humble people have a gentle and modest demeanor characterized by a lack of arrogance and selflessness. They are aware of their limitations and appreciate the talents and contributions of others. Their friendly demeanor and genuine respect for different perspectives enabled them to build meaningful relationships within their communities. Athletes who have been instilled with the spirit to win, compete during the match, and not give up easily must also be equipped with a humble nature so that they do not become arrogant, which can actually bring down an athlete. The following are the answers from respondents who stated that a humble personality is important to instill.

"I hope these players have been exposed to the psychology of these players, I like that kind of thing, even though they are athletes who have been instilled with the nature to

win, to fight, luckily they don't give up easily, they have to be humble." (JM11)

Brave

Courage is a remarkable quality that makes a person fearless in life's challenges, risks, and dangerous situations. Such people are unafraid to face new experiences and persist even in possible failure. They recognize failure as a path to personal growth and learning. Furthermore, they are brave enough to face their fears, refusing to let their worries get in their actions. They are not afraid to take calculated risks to pursue their goals and aspirations. Instilling a brave personality in athletes so that they are not afraid to fight against a strong team is important. The following are the answers from respondents who stated that a brave personality is important for an athlete.

"We want a player like that, meaning he has a strong mentality, a brave player. If we can implement it, he can be brave, even if the opponent is a strong team, we will fight it." (JM11)

Discussion

This study explores the personality traits needed by grassroots-level soccer players in Indonesia. Qualitative research methods with a grounded theory approach were used to answer the research questions. The study found that humility is an important personality trait that grassroots athletes must have. Ivarsson et al. (2020) stated that players who cannot control their egos tend to perform poorly. Grassroots athletes are those in the adolescent development stage whose emotions are not yet stable (Santrock, 2002). Therefore, mental coaches need to be able to manage the players' emotions. Self-humbleness also makes it easier for someone to control themselves. Self-control is difficult for an athlete to achieve when their ego is high. Athletes who have low self-control abilities tend to be less enthusiastic during heavy training, skip training sessions, and perform poorly when under pressure during competitions (Englert, 2017). Self-control can also increase an athlete's optimism and psychological well-being (Hernández Lalinde, García Álvarez, & Soler, 2021).

In addition, another essential personality that a grassroots athlete must have been being responsible. This personality is similar to the conscientiousness personality of the big five (McRae & John, 1992; McRae & Costa, 1987). This personality describes how self-aware an athlete is in behaving in their daily lives. According to Shuai et al. (2023), responsible and extroverted personalities play a role in helping an athlete achieve success in all sports. This personality also plays a vital role in improving the performance of female athletes (Pettersen, Adolfsen, & Martinussen, 2022). This personality also plays a vital role in sports that require high energy, such as mountain running, and can also increase an athlete's intrinsic motivation, motivation, and performance (Lopez & Sánchez, 2023; Perri et al., 2017; Mirzaei, Nikbakhsh, & Sharififar, 2013).

Mental toughness is one of the personalities that describes how an athlete can overcome problems and pressures in their lives. Someone unable to overcome problems will experience difficulties during training and competition, which can interfere with their performance. Shuai's et al. (2023) study found that athletes who are neurotic tend to experience problems in their performance. Research has shown that mental toughness and competition anxiety are negatively correlated. In other words, the higher the mental toughness of a student-athlete, the lower their anxiety levels, and vice versa. It is supported by research conducted by (Jannah et al., 2018; Wolter et al., 2021). Further research is needed to replicate these findings with a more extensive and more diverse group of subjects. In addition, it would be useful to explore whether the development of motor skills (physical) and cognitive functions (mental/mindset) can improve holistic development in athletes and non-athletes, as suggested by (Trecroci et al., 2021; Purnomo et al., (2024).

Grassroots athletes experience stress in their daily lives in various ways. They are more likely to seek help from non-team support staff than coaches and team-related support staff. They do not want to be seen as detrimental to their team (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020). Grassroots athletes' active participation in sports and representing themselves in sports tournaments can result in unsatisfactory academic performance. One of the factors causing this scenario is the mental toughness of grassroots athletes, which is often considered weak and can negatively affect their academic performance (Samsudin et al., 2021). According to a study by Bird et al. (2020), mental toughness has a positive relationship with sports-related well-being.

Other results show that an adaptive personality also plays an essential role for grassroots athletes. Mental adaptability in U-17 soccer players is crucial to their career development. Young players must adapt quickly to various situations in new environments and different teams. Adaptability includes physical, mental, and social aspects, all of which play an essential role in their performance on the field (Zakrajsek et al., 2007). Physically, U-17 players must adapt to higher training intensity and intense competition. Players must develop better endurance, strength, and technical skills to compete at a higher level. Mentally, players must be able to cope with pressure from coaches, fans, and themselves. Staying calm and focused under pressure is an essential indicator of an adaptive psyche (Castro-Sánchez et al., 2018). Athletes who can adapt to face new situations (progressive adjustment) and can survive for a long time (sustainable adjustment) can increase an athlete's motivation (Franck, Stambulova, & Ivarsson, 2018).

Conclusion

This study identifies the types of personality traits that grassroots athletes must possess to develop into professional soccer athletes. We interviewed ten coaches who have been coaching for five years. The results of our analysis revealed

five essential personality traits that athletes must possess. The first is mental toughness, that is, the personality of someone who can remain calm under pressure. The second is adaptive personality, which refers to individuals' ability to adapt to new environments and situations. The third personality trait is energetic, which indicates a personality full of enthusiasm when performing tasks. The fourth personality trait is humble, which does not emphasize one's abilities, and the fifth trait is brave, which indicates a personality that likes challenges. This study has limitations in that it only interviewed the coaches. Information obtained from the coach is essential for understanding the role of a football athlete's personality at the grassroots level. However, the player's perspective is also essential to explore as a comparison of perspectives. In addition, information from athletes related to their difficulties in developing themselves is also essential as input. It could be that these difficulties are related to certain personalities. Further research may include interviews with athletes. Another limitation of qualitative research is the ability to generalize the research results due to the limitations of the respondents. However, qualitative research results can help us understand other people's experiences and provide a deeper understanding of a concept. The results of this study have implications for creating programs or training for athletes to recognize their personalities so that they know their strengths and weaknesses as capital to develop their competitive skills.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in this research.

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